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TRANSIT IN OLD-TIME NEW YORK

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When Bowling Green was the transit center of New York

TRANSIT IN OLD-TIME NEW YORK

SINCE the early Colonial days dust-covered *diligences* from far-off New England and the remote town of Albany had rolled into the City of New York by way of the Boston Post Road and the Bloomingdale Road. They then proceeded down Broadway to Wall Street.

Then, too, there was a stage line, which carried venturesome tourists to the outlying villages of Greenwich, Yorkville, and Harlem.

Moreover, in 1827, Abraham Brower had started running a covered conveyance seating twelve persons, which had been built for him by John Stevenson. He called his carriage an "Accommodation." His route was over Beekman Street to Wall Street, and he picked up and dropped his fares as they listed, his charge being a shilling, regardless of the distance traveled. Two years later he added a closed coach, which he named the "Sociable."

But these startling innovations had not prepared the good townspeople for the sensational spectacle which met their eyes one memorable day in 1831. An enormous vehicle drawn by four horses and bearing in large letters, the legend "Omnibus —A. Brower," came rumbling down Broadway. The tradesmen ran from their shops, and the residents along Broadway hurried to the windows of their homes to behold

GOING TO BUSINESS IN 1857

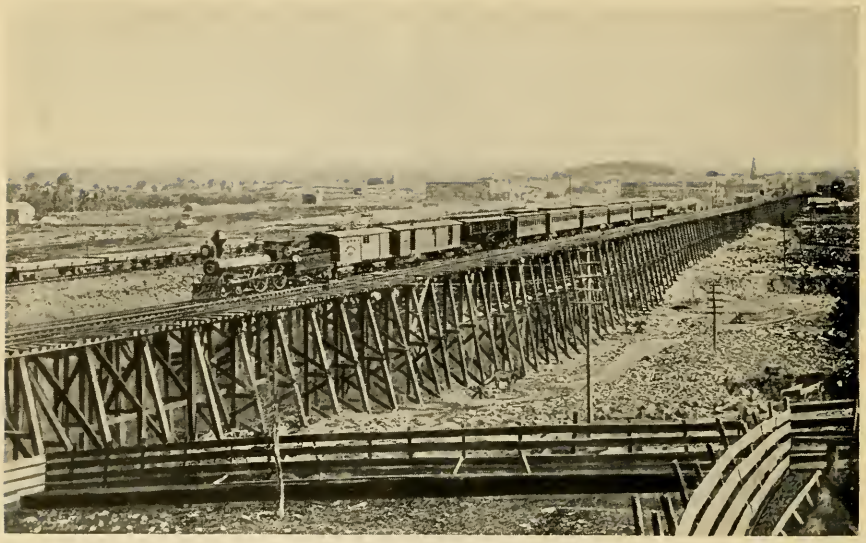
In those days the snow lay on the ground until it melted. Wheeled vehicles made poor progress through the snow-banks, and so the omnibus company resorted to the use of sleighs.

BROADWAY IN 1831

In this year Abraham Brower started his omnibus-line. Unless the artist gave too free a rein to his imagination, we must conclude that the congestion before St. Paul's Church was hardly less than it is to-day.

this, the eighth wonder of the world. They said, "Brower is surely overdoing it. His 'Accommodation' was all right and his 'Sociable' was all right, but there never will be traffic enough in this city to also support this great ark of an Omnibus."

But they were wrong. In spite of the exorbitant fare—for a shilling in those days amounted to almost as much as a dollar now—Brower's line prospered. Bus after bus was added until the people, who at first were proud of the city's progress, began to complain of the congestion on Broadway. The drivers of those omnibuses must have been terrible fellows—direct ancestors, no doubt, of the taxi-drivers of to-day. A contemporary bemoans the times and the customs. "The character of the omnibus-drivers has become brutal and dangerous to the highest degree," he writes. "They race up and down Broadway and through Chatham Street with the utmost fury. Broadway, especially between the Park and Wall Street, is almost daily the scene of some out-



EN ROUTE TO HARLEM, 1878

The wooden trestle shown in this picture was built along what was then called Fourth Avenue, across the valley between 100th Street and 116th Street. At this time the New York and Harlem ran to a station on the present site of Madison Square Garden, passing through the Fourth Avenue Tunnel, through which the Madison Avenue trolleys now run.

rage in which the lives of citizens riding in light vehicles are put in imminent hazard. Not content with running upon everything which comes in their way, they turn out of their course to break down other carriages. A ferocious spirit seems to have taken possession of the drivers, who defy the laws and delight in destruction."

However, the death-knell of the omnibus had already sounded. In 1832 the New York and Harlem Railway Company laid a pair of tracks from Prince Street to Fourteenth Street, and placed thereon a "street-car," built by the same redoubtable Stevenson who had made the Brower omnibuses. This horse-drawn railway-car was named "John Mason," after the president of the Chemical National Bank, who, I suspect, may have put his hand into his pocket to help along the enterprise. It was a great, lumbering vehicle, containing three compartments, each of which seated ten passengers. Thirty more could ride on the roof, to which access was gained by a flight of steps at the end of the contrivance.

In 1845 Stevenson changed the design of his car, omitting the side doors and crosswise seats, adopting end doors and side seats.

In those good old days before a

THE VOYAGE TO BROOKLYN, 1858

If we would believe the engravers of old New York, the East River was wider and the waves more tumultuous in those days than now. The New-Yorker was, indeed, venturesome who would hazard the perils of those wild waters to go to Brooklyn!

NEW YORK PIER OF THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE, 1876

The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge was perhaps the greatest engineering achievement of the latter half of the nineteenth century. Long Island is now moored to the American continent by five great bridges.

THE CRYSTAL PALACE ABOUT 1855

On July 4, 1853, the first World's Fair to be held in America was opened at the Crystal Palace by President Franklin Pierce. The Palace stood on what is now Bryant Park. This old print is very interesting in that it shows an old horse-car, an omnibus, and many varieties of private conveyances.

malevolent and soulless corporation offered to carry a passenger from the most northerly extremity of New York to Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn, a distance of about twenty miles, in an electric-lighted, solid vestibule, steel car, which runs smoothly, swiftly, and safely over heavy rails, charging for this service about a quarter of a cent a mile, in those good old days of horse-cars, our grandfathers allowed an hour and a quarter to go from Twenty-third Street to Vesey Street.

The cars were small and smelled like a menagerie. In winter the floors were covered with straw to prevent the feet of the passengers from becoming frost-bitten. At night the car was illuminated by two kerosene lamps, one placed in each end, which instead of dispelling the darkness only accentuated it. The tracks were so badly laid that the ride gave all the thrills of a Coney Island scenic railway. At intervals the joints were most uneven, and the passengers received shocks which almost jolted out of them their immortal souls.

Is it any wonder that some more modern and comfortable method of travel was demanded by a truly "long-suffering public"?

PROPOSED ARCADE UNDER BROADWAY

In 1867 the Legislature recommended that the solution of New York's transit problem lay in underground railroads. Here is one of the many schemes formulated at this time.

BROADWAY AT CITY HALL PARK DURING THE CIVIL WAR, SHOWING THE FAMOUS BROADWAY BUSSES.

For many years attempts had been made to gain a franchise for a street-car line on Broadway, but the merchants always fought the "desecration of the Highway."

On July 31, 1867, a special commission, which had been appointed by the State Senate to ascertain the best means for the transportation of passengers for the City of New York, published a report in which it recommended that "In the opinion of the Commission, the best method of speedily attaining the design contemplated is by the construction of *underground railroads*."

Soon thereafter capital was raised and a tunnel eight feet in diameter was dug under Broadway between Murray and Warren Streets. On April 26, 1870, guests were invited to inspect New York's first subway. They entered a car which was propelled by a most ingenious method. Be it remembered that the employment of electricity for turning a motor was still in its infancy. It was obvious that a steam-locomotive could not be used in a closed tunnel, and so the plan was adopted of literally blowing the car along the tracks by means of powerful fans set at the end of the tunnel.

The promoters promised to build this tunnel from the Battery to Harlem and to run in it cars one hundred feet long—but the funds

BROADWAY HORSE-CAR BEFORE THE FIFTH AVENUE HOTEL

HORSE-CARS AND ELEVATED RAILROAD AT HERALD SQUARE, 1900

FULTON STREET BRIDGE, BUILT IN 1866

Congestion over Broadway was so acute that this bridge was built to span the thoroughfare. People, however, preferred dodging the busses and trucks to climbing the stairs, and the bridge was taken down the next year.

were never forthcoming and the enterprise was abandoned.

Another ambitious scheme called for the construction of an underground arcade, having sidewalks and shops on either side and a roadbed in the middle, along which should glide cars propelled by compressed air. But this, too, came to nothing.

Meanwhile, another group of capitalists was hard at work erecting an elevated railroad. On July 2, 1867, the first section was completed. It ran from Battery Place, through Greenwich Street and Ninth Avenue to Thirteenth Street. At first it was operated by cable, but soon steam-locomotives were substituted. Alas, however, for the pioneer investors. In 1871 the road was sold out by the sheriff.

The next few years were full of trouble for the promoters of the elevated railway. Not only did they find it difficult to persuade investors to furnish the capital, but their lives were made miserable by litigation and the efforts to gain franchises and to obtain the rights of way. However, perseverance triumphed, as it always does, and in 1875 a commission which had been ap-

LAYING THE CABLES IN LOWER BROADWAY

pointed by the Legislature reported in favor of granting a franchise for the elevated railroads.

Now things began to go along swimmingly. Funds were rapidly forthcoming, and in 1876 the Greenwich Street road was extended to Fifty-ninth Street. The elated officers issued a public announcement in which they boasted that they were running forty trains a day!

In the spring of the next year, Cyrus W. Field purchased the controlling interest in the line and put the force of his indomitable personality back of the enterprise.

On July 5, 1876, the Sixth Avenue line was opened from Rector Street to Central Park. On April 26 of the same year, the rival road on Third Avenue was opened to Forty-second Street.

The next year saw the consolidation of the two companies under the name of the Manhattan Railway Company. In 1880, the Second Avenue line was opened to Sixty-seventh Street. Soon the elevated railroads on both sides of the city were extended to the Harlem River.

On July 24, 1916, a little horse-car, drawn by two cadaverous

NEW YORK'S FIRST "EL."

In 1868 a block of experimental elevated railroad was built along Greenwich Street south of Morris. The next year it was extended as far as Cortlandt Street.

horses, passed under the Municipal Building going toward Broadway. It disappeared in the west. And when this phantom-like horse-car, —this relic of ancient days—had passed, the last reminder of old-time transportation of New York faded from the eye of man.

BUILDING THE ELEVATED

This is the reproduction of a photograph taken in 1879. The wilderness through which the road is being constructed is Ninth Avenue and Sixty-fifth Street.

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